

Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One

May 4, 1991

The President. I really have nothing to say in addition to what I said yesterday, but I just want to welcome you on this beautiful—what a day out there. Fantastic. It is so beautiful. We're going off to this graduation there, the first graduation speech of the year out here at the University of Michigan, where they're really expecting, I think, a large number of people.

Commencement Address

Q. What are you going to talk about?

The President. Just general—kind of theory—life its own self, as my friend Dan Jenkins would say. Try to stay awake, Lori [Lori Santos, United Press International]. "Life Its Own Self." [Laughter] Did you ever read, you know, his book?

But everything's rather calm. You were going to ask about the graduation?

U.S. Military Bases in the Philippines

Q. No, I was going to ask: Is the United States going to be forced to leave its bases in the Philippines?

The President. Well, I don't think so, but we're having negotiations still going on, but it's still no deal. And we've made clear the limits beyond which we are certainly not prepared to go. I think the Philippine leaders understand that. But this isn't any *carte blanche* operation. This isn't any blank check. And we've gotten a very strong negotiator in Rich Armitage there, who has made clear to the Philippine leaders what the United States position is. But it's too early to say. They go up and down in these negotiations.

Q. Are you willing to walk away from the Philippines?

The President. We've told them that there are certain—a point beyond which we cannot go. But it's a very important facility there. I think the polls in the Philippines show strong support from the people, but there are some political leaders who are of a different persuasion. But it'll work out; I'm not too troubled by it. There are a lot of other problems out there.

Administration Travel Policy

Q. Is Governor Sununu with us today?

The President. He's down giving a graduation speech today.

Q. Where?

The President. I think it's in Florida.

Q. How did he get there? [Laughter]

The President. Ask him. He's following instructions, as I've said. But this would be considered clearly an official trip, any time you go out like this.

Q. Is that review about over?

The President. Yes, it's getting close.

Q. Up on your desk?

The President. No, but we're very close to coming out with these changes that I've said would be forthcoming.

Alaska Oilspill Reparations

Q. What did you think about the collapse of the Exxon agreement?

The President. Well, I don't really have a judgment on that. I mean, I think that both sides now agree to just go and try to litigate, and that's, in a sense, too bad. But on the other hand, that's their right. The State has a right to call it as they see it, and so does Exxon. So, they'll work it out. It's a good one for us to stay out of.

Iraq

Q. Are we trying to establish a permanent zone for the Kurds as part of the war reparations of Iraq?

The President. I wouldn't phrase it that way. I've always said that we were not interested in a dismembered or fractionated Iraq. That's not our—I made that so very clear from the very beginning that there shouldn't be any question about that one.

Q. Some London newspaper—15 units—plan for a—

The President. I don't know. I didn't see that, and that's certainly not official policy. But certainly we want these people's lives to be protected against this violence that's been wrought on them for many, many years. It's been going on forever, and it's terrible. But I'm a little pleased with the

way that's going out there now, too. America has done what it always does: stand up and try to help people. The operation is superb. I just hope that there will be a peaceful resolution, so they can all go back to their homes, which is what they want to do.

Hey, thanks a million for being with us on this trip. We appreciate you fellas being along, too.

Q. Thanks for inviting us.

The President. Well, that's all right.

Note: The exchange began at 8:45 a.m. while the President was en route to Ann Arbor, MI. In his remarks, the President referred to author Dan Jenkins; Richard L. Armitage, Special Negotiator for the future status of U.S. access to military facilities in the Philippines; and John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff to the President. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony in Ann Arbor

May 4, 1991

President Duderstadt, thank you all very much. Thank you for that warm welcome. I want to salute the president, salute Governor and Mrs. John Engler, Representatives of the Congress—Pursell, Upton, and Vander Jagt, and distinguished Regents, and especially I want to pay my respects to our fellow honorary degree recipients. Barbara and I are very grateful for this high honor. Before this, there wasn't one lawyer in the family, and now we have two.

The last time I was in Ann Arbor, we commemorated John Kennedy's unveiling of the Peace Corps. And as your commencement program indicates, Lyndon Johnson introduced the Great Society in a University of Michigan commencement address.

Today, I want to talk to you about this historic moment. Your commencement—your journey into the “real world”—coincides with this nation's commencement into a world freed from cold war conflict and thrust into an era of cooperation and economic competition.

The United States plays a defining role in the world. Our economic strength, our military power, and most of all, our national character brought us to this special moment. When our policies unleashed the economic expansion of the 1980's, we exposed forever the failures of socialism and reaffirmed our status as the world's greatest

economic power. When we sent troops to the Gulf, we showed that we take principles seriously enough to risk dying for them.

But there's another message. There's another message. We also take them seriously enough to help others in need. Today, men and women of Operation Provide Comfort toil on behalf of suffering Kurds. And today, our thoughts and prayers also go to the hundreds of thousands of people victimized by a vicious cyclone in Bangladesh. Our Government has sent aid to that stricken land. Dozens of private agencies have sprung into action as well, sending food, water, supplies, and donations. The humanitarian instinct runs deep in our people, always has. It is an essential element of our American character.

Our successes have banished the Vietnam-era phantoms of doubt and distrust. In my recent travels around the country I have felt an idealism that we Americans supposedly had lost. People have faith in the future. And they ask: What next? And they ask: How can I help?

We have rediscovered the power of the idea that toppled the Berlin Wall and led a world to strike back at Saddam Hussein. Like generations before us, we have begun to define for ourselves the promise of freedom.

I'd like to talk today about the nature of freedom and how its demands will shape